

john howard's body

PAUL MAGEE

People consider themselves put under an obligation as much by the benefits they confer as by those they receive.

Machiavelli

— PART ONE—MY BROTHER JACK

1.

'Under us, the views of all particular interests will be assessed against the national interest and the sentiments of all Australians': John Howard, 6th June 1995.¹ One of the greatest things about living in Australia is that we're essentially the same': John Howard, 28th October 1995.² 'Our society is underpinned by those uniquely Australian concepts of a fair go and practical mateship': John Howard, 20th November 1998.³ It is on the basis of quotes like these that Judith Brett has sought to answer the question that has left Australian intellectuals floundering for most of the last decade: 'How are we to understand the contribution of John Howard himself to the success of his governments?'⁴

Brett's thesis is that Howard's success arises from the way he has managed to associate two long-standing Australian traditions. The first is the traditional Liberal claim to represent the interests of the nation as a whole—as opposed to the interests of the class or the section, the latter role being attributed, of course, to Labor, with its origins in the labour movement of the 1890s, and its ongoing links to the unions. The Liberals govern for all of us. The second is the tradition of 'vernacular egalitarianism,' those notions of 'fair go,' 'practical mateship' and all being 'essentially the same' with which Howard dots his speech.⁵ Brett argues that

the Liberals, prior to Howard, had a real rhetorical problem: 'they had no plausible way of talking about anything other than economics'.⁶ Howard found that way. By merging a traditional Liberal commitment to the level playing field that is meant to make equals of all of us, with 'the symbolic repertoire of Australia's radical nationalist past,' Howard managed, Brett argues, 'to reconnect Australian Liberalism with ordinary Australian experience.'⁷ He made it convincing.

Where Keating spoke *to* the nation, Howard spoke from it—straight from the heart of its shared beliefs and commonsense understandings of itself. This is revealed in the images which surround the two men. Keating's are of foreignness. [...] Howard's are of suburban ordinariness—barbeques, cricket, the annual holiday at the same beachside resort, jogging in a shiny tracksuit festooned with logos.⁸

The most interesting and challenging aspect of Brett's argument is in her insistence that Howard's is indeed the people's language. She cites a focus-group study published in the *Australian Journal of Political Science* in 2000 which found 'remarkable agreement across the groups' studied as to just what Australian identity, events, values and beliefs are.⁹ The study included a group of non-English speaking women and found among them too 'references to mateship, owning a house, sport, having a go'.¹⁰ Here's some more examples, this time in direct quotes from Howard: our 'sense of fair play,' our 'strong egalitarian streak,' our 'openness and unpretentious character,' our 'creed of practical mateship'.¹¹ For Brett, these admittedly banal phrases are indices to Howard's creative genius; he's managed to make the Liberals a party with working-class appeal! What's more, people actually speak and feel this way. He's tapped into it. That's her thesis.

2.

'Like many Protestant women of the time, she was a bigot.'¹² I'm citing the journalist Milton Cockburn who wrote an article on Howard's background in 1989. The Prime Minister's mother hated Catholics. She was born one. Mona Howard (nee Kell) was born in 1899, and instructed in the Catholic religion until the age of eight. At that time, her mother died of cancer, and her care was transferred to her father's Protestant family. She grew to hate Catholics in the process. Her four sons were made to know about it. Mona Howard discouraged her sons from forming friendships with Catholics of either sex, and she was particularly opposed to any romantic attachments. Gerard Henderson cites Cockburn's article, and adds some research of his own to it in the short, but extraordinarily revealing biography he published in his 1995 book *A Howard Government? Inside the Coalition*. Henderson adds that the young John Howard did not like his mother's bigotry. Henderson goes on to suggest that this dislike inspired much of Howard's subsequent politics. According to Henderson, the 'subliminal

attitude which formed the basis of Howard's early opposition to multiculturalism' was the desire to repudiate the world of Protestant exclusionism in which he had grown up: 'unity, however artificial, was preferable to plurality if the latter led to emphasis on difference'.¹³ Hence the thoroughly artificial, and typically Howard, vision of 'a common Australian culture'.¹⁴ It's a curious thought: that Howard's lifelong campaign against difference might harken back to his mother's bigoted assertion of it.

But if that's the case, doesn't one then have to conclude that the real person Howard is attacking—in railing against all these 'special interests', these people who see themselves as different from the rest of us, the elites, the 'Aboriginal industry', the feminists—is in fact his own mother? Who in turn resented her origins. That's another implication of Henderson's argument. It's not a pretty picture. Mind, it probably won't surprise anyone who's lived under the Howard government. Attacking mothers seems comparatively mild. Howard's most enduring images concern the abuse of children: the Stolen Generations, Governor-General Peter Hollingworth, Children Overboard, Children in Detention. Above all, Children in Detention. You might want to add to that list, handing the Bali 9 over to their likely death in 2005. As I said, the biography won't surprise anyone who's lived under Howard, not even those who vote for him. The real question is why they continue to do so.

3.

Brett is not unaware of this, which is why it's worth reading her. She quotes well-known Aboriginal activist Noel Pearson's reaction to 'For All of Us,' the slogan which heralded Howard's first, 1996, election victory:

when he first heard 'For All of Us', he thought 'but not for them' and knew that indigenous Australians were being positioned as one of the noisy minorities.¹⁵

The key point for Brett is that she's not convinced that Howard's scapegoating of vulnerable members of the community explains why people keep voting for him. She disagrees, and she completely rejects the corollary assumption, which is indeed huge: that Howard's four terms in office, up to and including the landslide 2004 election, which won him control of both houses, demonstrates that 'the Australian people' are 'racist, uncaring, reactionary'.¹⁶ She doesn't buy it, and she doesn't accept that it shows them to be 'opportunists, hypocrites or liars' either.¹⁷

Brett acknowledges the exclusions which Howard invariably structures into his language of national unity. Where she disagrees with critics like Carol Johnson and Guy Rundle—and this, as I said, is the most challenging part of her argument—is in the implication that the bigotry is what people are voting for. She puts forward an alternate view: people vote for Howard because he speaks to them, as one of them, in their language, about the nation they

know and love: 'as prime minister he talks to them about Australia in the language they share'.¹⁸ To underline this point, Brett concludes her recent essay, which is entitled *Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia*, with the case studies of four 'ordinary people who vote Liberal.' None of them articulates overtly racist ideas, or seems particularly bigoted. In fact, they are all quite disinterested in politics. The main interest in Lois's life, for instance, is sport. 'Sport is the centre of her life and she places it at the centre of the nation'; she might 'have no time for migrants who complain about Australia', but she's generally positive about multiculturalism and basically votes Howard because of his 'nationalism—his recognition of the deep pleasures people draw from being Australian.'¹⁹ For Brett, Howard's critics can't hear voices like Lois's. They can't even hear him, nor his language, with its capacity to 'strike chords with aspects of Australian experience'.²⁰

4.

Brett's concern is for the reputation of 'the Australian people', though I'd like to suggest that there is an intellectual agenda here too. After all, there are significant intellectual implications to her argument. Brett's desire to defend 'the Australian people', by understanding the non-pathological motives driving a majority of them to vote Howard, leads her to take issue with one of the key currents of twentieth-century thought. 'Many intellectuals are suspicious of nationalism', automatically assuming it to be a ruse for bigotry.²¹ For Brett, this assumption is not merely an intellectual failure, it's a strategic failure as well:

Because whenever he has evoked a national 'us' he has been accused of really demonising a non-national 'them', Howard's critics have been unable to develop any effective or plausible counter-strategies for talking to their fellow Australians. If you regard any talk of 'us' as illegitimate, it is not clear to me whom you are going to talk to.

Whereas:

Nations are not simply formed and defined by their opposition to or difference from some Other; they are also formed and defined by shared experiences and collective memories. They have centres as well as borders. As I have been arguing, Howard speaks persuasively from that centre.²²

This is clearly an attack upon post-structuralism, which does not have the will of the people behind it.

5.

Let's look at some of Jack's language. It's easy to forget, reading Brett—and perhaps feeling guilty at not being a man of the people like Howard—to actually test whether what she's

saying is correct, or not. Consider ‘practical mateship’, one of the phrases Jack loves to use when he talks to voters ‘about Australia in the language they share’.²³ What the #\$\$@! is ‘practical mateship’? Whatever it means, when have you ever heard anyone actually say it? Just whose language is this? Turn to another great Howardism, a phrase from the 1996 *Four Corners* interview during which he gave his famous vision of a ‘comfortable and relaxed’ Australia, under him. Asked by Liz Jackson to describe himself, Jack responded ‘I’m a quint-essential Australian, an average Australian bloke’.²⁴ Where do you hear the word ‘quint-essential’ spoken? By what conceivable measure do you pass that off as the ‘average’ language? Now being ‘average’ is of course an act, and a difficult one at that, because no one really knows just what is average at any given moment. You perform your normality, and it always involves an element of improvisation. My point is that Howard is no good at it. Take that curious word ‘bloke’, which is not always so easy to use. Here is Howard trying to cover over a fight—a ‘near physical fight’ according to *The Age*—between senators Bill Heffernan and Barnaby Joyce in August 2005. Probed on the altercation, Howard replied: ‘Bill is a good bloke and Barnaby’s a good bloke. They’re both good blokes and they’re both my blokes as far as I’m concerned.’²⁵ They’re both my blokes? How does that one work? It’s like he’s trying to say ‘They’re both my homies’.

The more you actually test Brett’s thesis as to Howard’s command of the tradition of ‘vernacular egalitarianism’ (‘Because it is the language he speaks naturally, it never fails him’²⁶), the more you realise how untenable it is. Another example: ‘the great Australian capacity to work together in adversity—I call it mateship’.²⁷ ‘I call it mateship.’ That’s hilarious. He sounds like Moses. In another life, Howard might have been a comedian. The other thing you realise, reading the few commentators who address the question of Howard’s style, is that most of them say exactly the opposite to Brett. Here’s journalist Mungo MacCallum:

Howard has never had the common touch; he doesn’t like the public bar scenes in which Hawke revelled, and invariably shows his awkwardness when his minders propel him into them.²⁸

The awkwardness is not just over beers. Here’s Donald Horne on Howard’s way with words:

Howard talks and talks, in speeches, on radio and television and on doorstep interviews—his mouth opens and shuts but he hasn’t found a way of making us want to listen. He can seem cranky or at least bothered when he speaks. His eyes are troubled, as if we’re going to have a go at him. His voice is thin: sometimes he is almost boyish, but with a wrinkled brow. He doesn’t seem to want to open out to us. He plays the man of the people but he hasn’t got Menzies’ feeling for the people. When Howard talks to us it is as if he doesn’t really want to engage.²⁹

For Horne, 'Howard's most credible media appearance as a common man is when he laughs'. Howard may be unable to 'convincingly express generosity [...] compassion' or even 'laconicism' (all of this strikes Horne as most 'un-Australian') but he can laugh: 'Not the smile, which is usually uncertain or cocky, but the full-frontal laugh'.³⁰ If you keep in mind the links psycho-analysis has established between laughter, aggression and repression, this 'full-frontal laugh' will probably seem less out of character. But I'm jumping ahead of myself. Just what do people take Howard's character to be?

6.

I'll remind you of the question with which I began this article. It's Judith Brett's question: 'How are we to understand the contribution of John Howard himself to the success of his governments?'³¹ In fact, it's not just Brett's question. His opponents, she reminds us, are asking the same thing, albeit in a different tone:

How has he gotten away with it? Why can't people see the contradictions and the dissemblings? Why hasn't he been held to account for his broken promises, or the way he has played upon baseless fears?³²

I've begun to undermine Brett's response, insofar as it concerns Howard's capacity to pass as normal. To the contrary, I am going to argue that Howard's electoral success is a function of his capacity to present himself as thoroughly abnormal. Howard may well say that 'we're essentially the same', but a crucial source of his power is the fact that he himself is not. That's the real conclusion to draw from Brett's essay. Howard does not stand in for anyone. In his language, his body and his behaviour, he is the exception.

It was Horne's book with its extraordinary portraits of Howard's bodily style that set me upon this thesis, which is supported by the archive I have been collecting of images of Howard's body. Horne led me to realise that in representations of Howard's body, he is invariably presented as someone who does not fit in. My preliminary research has borne this out.

Horne gives the ridiculous image of Howard reviewing the troops, 'swinging his arms and quick-marching like an eager rookie', trying just a bit too hard,

like someone who didn't fit in. It was the same when he assumed what he seemed to see as the ethnic dress of rural areas—grey flannel trousers, sports jacket, sports shirt and tie, and on top of his head, a mini-Akubra. Despite this disguise he looked like a suburbanite dressed for a North Shore Sunday morning Liberal Party sausage sizzle. Again, there was a sense of parody.³³

In similar fashion, Guy Rundle describes Howard on his morning walks, 'the short-trousered boy-man striding through a series of foreign capitals like Tintin'.³⁴ I've cited Horne, MacCallum

and Rundle on Howard's failure to fit in. These are all people who dislike him. Take MacCallum. MacCallum opens his book *Run, Johnny, Run: The Story of the 2004 Election* with a list of Howard's nicknames, and settles upon 'the unflushable turd' as the one most true to Howard's electoral successes.³⁵ You don't say that about someone you like. One might conclude that all these references to Howard's bodily inadequacy—up to and including the photo of him jogging on the front cover of *Run, Johnny, Run*—are simply jibes from his enemies. Nor does MacCallum draw back from reminding us of the days when Howard's fellow Liberal politicians 'openly referred to him as the little cunt'.³⁶

But Howard's body is a broader phenomenon than that. The thing is that Howard supporters also discuss the Prime Minister's physical drawbacks. Take those four case studies Brett presents in *Relaxed and Comfortable*, which for her serve to demonstrate the non-pathological dimensions of the public's support for Howard. I've already mentioned Lois, who is from the country and loves sport. Marc, on the other hand, is a 25-year-old in occasional employment. The son of Croatian immigrants, Marc's main interest in life is going to the same nightclub every week. He votes Howard:

I really think he's a good leader. He takes the hard decisions. He's not much of an attractive guy, in fact the main thing I've got against him is his looks. But people look past that and say well it doesn't matter if he's attractive, or if he's sucking up to all the big people around the world, we're still voting for him because he's a true Australian, no matter what.³⁷

Marc ignores Howard's unattractive body, because Howard takes the hard decisions. Caroline is another of Brett's case studies. She runs the office in her husband's small business, and refers to Howard, whom she votes for, as 'little Johnny Howard'. In doing so, she repeats the widespread myth (recall MacCallum's 'the little cunt') that Howard is actually small.³⁸ He's a little under average height, about 5'5'. Compared to Bob Hawke, he's a giant. As for Lois, who loves sport, her comment, when first interviewed in 1988, was 'And Howard just thinks he's so fantastic and so does his wife. I mean he's an embarrassment'.³⁹

— PART TWO—THE REAL CONTRADICTION

7.

I've cited a number of references now as to how Howard stands out, in his language and in his body. In both domains, he stands out as one who doesn't fit in. According to MacCallum, 'He comes across as a nerd and a dag, but as a mildly defiant one. It appears the electorate gives him marks for at least trying'.⁴⁰ A familiar left-wing argument suggests itself here, in this image of Howard as a 'defiant' nerd. Could this be the secret of his success, the way anyone who has ever felt themselves excluded from the prevailing systems of judgement can identify with his plight, and the revenge into which he channels it?

Carol Johnson offers a powerful version of this sort of argument in her analysis of the 1996 election—the ‘Revenge of the Mainstream’ as she characterises it—that first brought Howard to power.⁴¹ Johnson argues that Howard asked the electorate to identify with him in 1996 by appealing to his ‘somewhat negative past image’. The identity he offered was

that of a long-term loser and political battler asking the electorate to embrace a political leader that it had rejected so decisively nearly a decade before.⁴²

Johnson is referring to Howard’s 1987 election loss, his widely ridiculed policy document *Future Directions*, from the following year (in Malcolm Farr’s words ‘its cover was something of an embarrassment. It featured a couple who would not have been out of place in a soap commercial, with their two soap-commercial children, beaming before a charming house with a white picket fence’),⁴³ his disastrous refusal to rule out race-based restrictions upon immigration, which gave Bob Hawke such mileage that year, and then his loss of the Liberal leadership in 1989. By 1996, these losses were all points of potential identification.

His apparent vulnerability was part of his appeal to a vulnerable nation. Howard asked the electorate to resurrect him just as it was to resurrect Australian self-respect.⁴⁴

The possibility this argument raises is that we think of Howard’s physical drawbacks as features with which voters in fact identify.

It is certainly the case that Howard has appealed, again and again, to people who feel that they have missed out. In 1995, he was attacking ‘particular interests’, those supposedly trendy social movements which had achieved political representation over the previous thirty years: ‘Many Australians in the mainstream feel utterly powerless to compete with such groups who seem to have the ear completely of the government on major issues’.⁴⁵ Anyone who believed they had failed the test of trendiness could feel at one with Howard on this. Given that the groups supposedly rendering the rest ‘utterly powerless’ included ‘feminists, gays and lesbians, multicultural groups and Aboriginal organizations’, there’s an aptness to Johnson’s suggestion that ‘the ultimate revenge of the mainstream is to steal the identity of victim’.⁴⁶ ‘I wonder how many people’, Donald Horne asks, incredulously, ‘remember the first positive act of the Howard government?’ Horne describes Senator Herron, the newly appointed Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, announcing that Cabinet had decided, at its first meeting, to run an audit through ATSIC, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission. Horne is incredulous: ‘All those issues confronting Australia, and they picked *this* as number one?’⁴⁷ But of course. Aboriginal people had been making whites feel ‘utterly powerless’ for years. Because of the colour of their skins.

Ten years later and the theme of resentment at missing out is still playing into Howard’s hands. Writing in to Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* on 4 April 2006, the day after the launching of

the government's new industrial relations laws, which saw a massive shift in the balance of power in favour of employers, Maxine Wade was all in favour: 'I "temped" for years and we were never paid for public holidays or sick leave'. She survived: 'You had to manage your money carefully and save hard for holidays and time without work'. So why should anyone else get off lightly?

It appears some public servants can't even work a 10-day fortnight—it's just too hard. Many of these people would not survive in the private sector, where you stay until the job is done and quite often have lunch at your desk. Why do we need a Queen's Birthday holiday, or Labor Day, or bank holidays, or picnic days?⁴⁸

'Equality for all—isn't that what democracy is all about?' Ken Hood wrote on that same day, in praise of the legislation.⁴⁹ 'Good on you, John Howard', ran W.R. O'Reilly's letter, 'for finally taking power away from these thugs'.⁵⁰ He meant trade unionists. Again, the appeal is to anyone who has ever felt unfairly treated, or made, like Howard himself, to feel small.

Keeping in mind that Aboriginal people have the worst health and economic profile of any group in Australia, the idea that whites are their victims, with a legitimate right of redress, seems pretty extraordinary. In fact, the Howard government has offered its supporters the chance to feel victimised by an astonishing array of people. '[T]hat kind of emotional blackmail is very distressing', Howard said, in the lead up to the 2001 election, of the Afghani asylum seekers his government had fallaciously accused of throwing their own children overboard.⁵¹ 'We are a humane people' he claimed, in reference to his deployment of the SAS to prevent the Tampa, a Norwegian boat carrying 438 asylum seekers who had been rescued at sea, from docking on Australian land. 'We are a humane people. Others know that and they sometimes try to intimidate us with our own decency.'⁵² He was insinuating that the refugees were trying to make us feel guilty, and small, so that they could get more than their fair share of Australian asylum. Scholars have written at length of the manifest inaccuracy and unfairness of the 'queue jumper' label, coined by Bob Hawke and used with ever increasing frequency since.⁵³ The thing to note here is the way such abuse serves to collapse that issue too into a 'level playing field' divided between those who try to get more than their due, and those mainstream bodies who suffer as a result, and so have the right of revenge.⁵⁴

8.

The preceding paragraphs offer one way to answer Brett's question as to Howard's personal contribution to his electoral successes. They are still, I believe, insufficient. They are insufficient because of one simple fact. However often Howard hammers the table with demands for equality and fairness, however often 'special interests' are put in their place, however much he insists that 'everyone must want the same and have the same',⁵⁵ he himself doesn't submit to these demands.

In writing this, I am, in part, agreeing with Brett's critique of arguments like the one I have just rehearsed. You can't explain Howardism simply in terms of its 'opposition to or difference from some Other'.⁵⁶ Mind, none of the commentators I've read try to. Take Johnson, who reads the 1996 election in terms of a 'revenge of the mainstream'. In her analysis of the 1998 victory, she argues that such a strategy was no longer very pertinent to Howard's campaign for a second term. Howard may have argued that 'special interests' were benefiting under Keating while he was campaigning in opposition, but a similar argument against governmental favouritism could hardly be run after two years in office; he had to offer something more 'positive'.⁵⁷ Hence his announcement, in June 1998, that his government, if re-elected, would introduce a Goods and Services Tax. Malcolm Farr comments: 'in 1998 there was a sense of daring in the Government as it asked the electorate to endorse a new tax without knowing its detail'.⁵⁸ Part of the reason for this daring was that such a policy involved Howard breaking his promise that he would 'never ever' introduce such a tax, a promise he made on reassuming the Liberal party leadership in 1995. Robert Manne is sardonic: 'never ever' was redefined to mean not in the government's first term'.⁵⁹ In effect, Howard was asking voters to sanction him as a prime minister who didn't have to keep his word. Given that the previous two years had seen him break his 1996 pre-election promises to maintain university (which lost 5%), ABC (over 10%) and public service (some 26 000 jobs over 1996 and 1997) funding at current levels, this was quite an ask, and one the government almost lost.⁶⁰ Brett is right. You can't explain Howard's four election victories simply in terms of a revenge of the nerds. But she's wrong in imagining that any of Howard's academic critics try to.

We're left with a contradiction. In 1998, Howard was openly breaking faith with the 'mainstream' he'd led, and challenging them *not* to vote him out for doing so. They didn't. You can't explain that by claiming that Howard works through eliciting a popular resentment against elites/minorities. But nor can you explain it by presenting him as a mouthpiece for the spirit of the people. To the contrary, in insisting on this 'modernisation of Australia's supposedly antiquated tax system' in 1998, Howard was acting like one of the 'self-appointed cultural elite'; he, and his educated advisors, knew what was best for us.⁶¹ He was acting just like the people he'd attacked to win the previous election!

Now in fairness to Brett, whose argument I've been following to this point, it needs to be added that she's aware of this contradiction.⁶² I also want to add that I have singled out a specific strand from her work on the topic of Howard's success: that which concerns his ability to 'speak persuasively from the centre'. For the overall tenor of her analysis is in fact to downplay Howard's exceptionality, his difference to prior Australian and Liberal traditions, and to this end she invokes a whole range of other factors, including Labour's current inadequacy, that have contributed to his success. The reason I'm holding so tightly to this strand, and focusing on it to the exclusion of all others, is because I think that in it Brett has diagnosed

the overwhelming source of Howard's power: his personal relation to a putative centre. Only it's a thoroughly eccentric relation.

It's not so much that Howard gets away with claiming special privileges for himself, all the time attacking others for their supposed privileges, but rather that such hypocrisy is integral to his appeal. The man who enforces the law of the level playing field simultaneously requests special privileges for himself, and this contradiction *in itself* binds people to him. Ultimately, I read his exceptional body as a symbol of just this dynamic. It's a body with the right to be different. This argument will take some time to unfold. I'll start with the small matter of his birthday.

Helen Irving describes John Howard as a 'politician with a limited faith in government'.⁶³ In a 2004 essay testing his claim to be a constitutional conservative, she precedes her survey of his negligent relation to the principles of that document with a mention of his 64th birthday, in 2003. Howard had promised to announce whether he wished to continue in the leadership on that date. Irving's disquiet is salutary:

There is something disturbing in a prime minister's assumption, mid-term, that he alone may decide whether or not to remain, that his personal anniversary is an appropriate occasion for announcing that decision, and that he can, with impunity, keep his electors and the rest of the nation waiting, and speculating, while he decides. This might seem a small matter, but it symbolises how the Prime Minister is altering Australia's constitutional landscape.⁶⁴

In the rest of her essay, Irving suggests that part of that alteration has concerned the contempt Howard and his ministers have shown for the constitutionally enshrined principle of the separation of powers. Just as Howard's birthday took on the significance of a national political occasion, there has been a bloating of the powers of the legislature and the executive, at the expense of that third arm of government, the judiciary. I could rehearse the various ways in which Howard and his ministers have shown contempt for the judiciary. For instance, one of the traditions associated with the separation of powers, and indeed the rule of law more generally, is that governments do not undermine public faith in the courts. As the Chief Justice of the High Court Sir Gerard Brennan put it, in a 1997 letter of rebuke to Howard's deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer: 'You will appreciate that public confidence in the constitutional institutions of government is critical to the stability of our society'.⁶⁵ Fischer had been criticising what he saw as the court's delays in giving judgement in the *Wik* native title case. 'It's curious', Peter Charlton comments, in relation to radio announcer Alan Jones, 'how people who like to describe themselves as conservative often hold such cavalier views on the rule of law'.⁶⁶ Howard's decision to appoint Philip Ruddock Attorney-General in 2003, after Ruddock had launched a string of similar attacks, could not have been more cavalier. Tradition holds that the Attorney-General is the courts' guardian.⁶⁷

But it's not enough, if we are to understand Howard's success with the electorate, simply to list his various violations of legal convention and principle. There is also the question of personal principle. If Howard is cavalier in relation to the rule of law, his relation to personal probity has been little short of contemptuous. What stops it from assuming that characteristic is the fact that it's democratically mandated. Rather than try to hide his various transgressions of trust and principle, Howard campaigns on them. The main problem in the critical literature on Howard is the failure to come to terms with this fact, which is indeed quite shocking. Howard's hypocrisy—his tendency to break the laws of rightness and fair play which he otherwise imposes so brutally—is democratically mandated. He campaigns on it.

The idea that Howard should be indulged as a special case is something he's asked people to vote on three times now. In fact, it's been his key electoral strategy over the ten years. In 1998, Howard asked to be validated as the man who would bring in a GST he'd promised 'never, ever' to introduce. Then again, in 2004, he asked to be validated as the man with the right to lie to the electorate, both in relation to the past, and the future. The past lie concerned the false 'Children Overboard' claims that gave the government such mileage ('that kind of emotional blackmail is very distressing') in the previous election. A Morgan poll conducted in the fortnight before the 2004 campaign began found that 60% of those polled believed Howard had lied during the previous election. Asked which candidate was 'more honest and trustworthy', 40% named Latham, 28% Howard. A headline in the tabloid *Herald Sun* ran: 'Credibility and truth have emerged as the Prime Minister's Achilles Heel'.⁶⁸ With the spotlight squarely on his lack of credibility, Howard chose to campaign on just that Achilles Heel. As he announced, on the 29th of August,

This election, Ladies and Gentleman, will be about trust. Who do you trust to keep the economy strong and protect family living standards? Who do you trust to keep interest rates low? Who do you trust [...] ⁶⁹

Effectively, Howard was asking the electorate to validate his right to lie to them. That this is the case was further underlined by Howard's lie for the future, his claim ('which' MacCallum comments on the side, 'Peter Hartcher in the *Sydney Morning Herald* christened almost admiringly "The Big Lie"')⁷⁰ that interest rates are always higher under Labour, because they spend more. That the claim had no factual basis was widely reported soon after. Howard persisted in the lie regardless, or perhaps for this very reason, and to the extent of having 'keeping interest rates low' embossed on the front of the rostrum from which he delivered his campaign press conferences. Again, and as in 1998, Howard was asking voters to sanction him as the prime minister who didn't have to keep his word. He was asking to be treated as an exception.

The man who imposes the law of the level playing field brutally on others himself expects to be exempt from its operations. Peter Charlton illustrates this paradox well, in his consideration of the Tampa affair that was so instrumental in Howard's 2001 victory:

'That boat will never land in our waters—never', he emphatically told a small group of reporters. As the newspaper reported later, 'The politician—whose career is a testament to his stubbornness—appeared to be operating on pure adrenalin at the end of one of the most dramatic days of his prime ministership. Howard's eyes bulged, his face reddened and he shifted restlessly as he spoke'.

Clearly that 'never' was different from the 'Never, ever' promise not to introduce a GST.⁷¹

I quote this extended description of Howard's bodily performance of the law because it strikes me as more than simply caricature, however much it fits within the images of exceptionality and hypocrisy that I've been considering. I hear a degree of awe in these lines too. They describe a body whose passions demand to have their way. As it stands, the 2001 campaign was yet another, in fact the most outrageous of all, instance where Howard asked the electorate to validate his right to personal indulgence. In 2001, he asked to be validated as the man who brought out the Navy ('three warships, ten patrol boats, a supply ship, one transport vessel, Seahawk helicopters and P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft') to defend our shores from some 3 000 'victims of some of the most brutally repressive regimes on earth'.⁷² This crazy 'show of force' had no real motive at all other than Howard's own personal re-election. It was an extraordinarily indulgent use of public funds—some 500 million dollars, by Marr and Wilkinson's calculations (a billion according to Waterford's more recent estimate).⁷³ This was Howard's real birthday present to himself. In 2001, as before in 1998, and again in 2004, Howard, the enforcer of sameness, requested a democratic mandate to be different, in fact, to indulge the most extraordinary egoism. He received it.

How does one make sense of that?

— PART THREE—WHAT ATTRACTS PEOPLE TO IT?

9.

'If one cannot be the favourite oneself, at all events no body else shall be the favourite'.⁷⁴ For Sigmund Freud, these resentful strains are first heard in the nursery, in the response of an elder child to the arrival of a newborn sibling. They actually constitute a form of resignation, for what the elder child would really like to do is to 'put his successor jealously aside, to keep it away from the parents, and to rob it of all its privileges'.⁷⁵ He soon realises his impotence in this regard. Unable to rid the world of his rival, the elder decides that it will be best just to identify with him as an equal. Traces of the initial resentment remain, however, in the

vehemence with which a child will clamour ‘for justice, for equal treatment for all’ if the other seems to have received more than his or her fair share. This, for Freud, is more than just nursery, or schoolyard politics (‘that nerdy kid from 6A with the funny eyebrows’—that’s how Howard appears to his fellow schoolmates in Christopher Milne’s *Little Johnny and the Naughty Boat People*, which was written for children⁷⁶); it’s the origin of democracy itself:

What appears later on in society in the shape of *Gemeingeist*, *esprit de corps*, ‘group spirit’, etc., does not belie its derivation from what was originally envy. No one must want to put himself forward, every one must want the same and have the same. Social justice means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well.⁷⁷

Recall Ken Hood, of Mayfield, celebrating the new industrial relations legislation which would drastically diminish union power and worker’s rights: ‘Equality for all—isn’t that what democracy is all about?’ Yes, would be the Freudian answer, it’s about resentment. Howard’s a perfect channel for it. He appeals to voters as a victim, a victim who takes it out on others. He offers a channel for sibling resentment.

This Freudian reading of the ‘demand for equality’, that compromise formation whereby sibling resentment is channelled into democratic feeling, may well explain some of the features of Howardism. But insofar as it does, it renders the contradiction I have just outlined even more stark. If Howard taps into this primal core of sibling resentment—‘everyone must want the same and have the same’—and wields it against others with such violence, how does he himself escape the net? He doesn’t just escape the net; he campaigns on his freedom from it!

To understand Howard in terms of Freud’s theory one needs to turn to the object of sibling resentment, which is of course the love of the parent. This is in fact vital to Freud’s theory. There are three terms to sibling resentment: child, sibling, and parent. Freud argues that we cannot understand the democratic feeling to which sibling resentment later gives rise unless we take account of the persistence of this hierarchical structure: ‘it is impossible to grasp the nature of a group if the leader is disregarded’.⁷⁸ Freud insists that there is always an authority figure lurking in the background—or prominent in the foreground—of any group. In effect, Freud does not believe in the empirical reality of democracy, that is, rule by the mass. It’s always the mass plus one. It’s instructive to note that electoral democracies always have single individuals to lead them.⁷⁹ Nor would Freud accept that racism is simply a matter of the subject and his other. He’s no post-structuralist. There’s always a third term, a personification of authority (Pauline Hanson, John Howard, Slobodan Milosevic, whoever) in there as well. In sum, both democracy and racism are modes of patriarchy. The ‘demand for equality’ innate

to both is predicated upon the presence of a leader, for he or she serves to reproduce the familial structure in which such ‘demands for equality’ originate.⁸⁰

What makes this theory pertinent to our analysis of Howard’s appeal is Freud’s observation that the leader is exempt from the law binding all the others. As Freud puts it, democratic formations may well be characterised by the ‘demand that equalization shall be consistently carried through’, but we should never forget that ‘the demand for equality in a group applies only to its members and not to the leader’.⁸¹ The leader, John Howard himself, is exempt. Freud is quite blunt about the reason why. They love him.

But what could Freud mean by love, in the context of political leadership? He means exactly the same thing as romantic love:

[W]e have always been struck by the phenomenon of sexual overvaluation—the fact that the loved object enjoys a certain amount of freedom from criticism, and that all its characteristics are valued more highly than those of people who are not loved, or than its own were at a time when it itself was not loved.⁸²

That such comments are relevant to political figures too will make more sense if we turn to the phenomenon I’ve discussed above: the attention Howard repeatedly draws to the holes in his own credibility. Let’s put this in a broader social context too, the drama surrounding the 2001 election. Part of the way you know that you are one of the people is that you find yourself being swayed, without logical foundation, by one of its stories, as when you find yourself and your nation’s borders under threat from asylum seekers, a threat sufficient to bear comparisons with September 11, and to necessitate a naval blockade of the Indian Ocean. The crazily counter-factual nature of this, and the ‘Children Overboard’ myth, may well, I am suggesting, have added to their interpellative power in constituting the group. The opportunity to express violent sibling resentment against a human target would be another such factor. The main factor, however (‘if these reports are true’, added Howard, clarifying that they weren’t)⁸³ would be the presence of a voice offering to hold it all together regardless. How? By acting as if there was no way people wouldn’t love him. In presenting himself as one who is clearly exempt from the brutality of the law (of truth, of morality, of fairness, of ordinary appearance even), Howard was giving the group a foundation stronger than any logic. That made the unreality of the rest of the show easier to swallow. It was cushioned by love. Understood in this light, Howard’s repeated act of highlighting, and yet refusing to apologise for, his shortcomings, is tantamount to a seduction routine. If we want to experience the delusion of overvaluing another human being, which is to say, if we want to fall in love, what better candidate than one who makes clear not only his faults, but also the possibility of ignoring them? You’re free to love.

A curious, and quite general question arises at this juncture. If love really involves this sort of generosity of spirit, this ability to overlook another's faults, why does anyone even bother? Since when have humans felt the need to think nicely of another? Aren't we the people who invented mandatory detention centres?

Freud argues that the lover's indulgence has a directly narcissistic cause. The lover is treating the object in the same way as himself. It literally is himself, an externalised version of his ego. That's why it gives the lover such pleasure to bestow kindness upon it. He's really loving himself.

We love it on account of the perfections which we have striven to reach for our own ego, and which we should now like to procure in this roundabout way as a means of satisfying our narcissism.⁸⁴

Only, Freud adds, it's not quite the ego whose role the loved one assumes, as rather what he calls the ego ideal. The reason the two are so assimilable, yet separable, is that the ego ideal is an archaic residue of an earlier ego. It's the memory, or rather fantasy, that we retain of that 'original narcissism in which the childish ego enjoyed self-sufficiency'.⁸⁵

Freud argues that children, as they grow up, come gradually to learn that they are not the centre of the universe, nor even their parents' desires. We lose that certainty. But we cannot help but preserve, somewhere in the psyche, a figuring of that ideal and perfect self. This is the figure the loved one really comes to assume, that of the loved child one once was. The fact the lovers frequently resort to infantile forms of address to express their affection is an illustration of this. In loving one another in this fashion, lovers are really resurrecting their own majestic and long lost selves:

it seems very evident that another person's narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are in search of object-love. The charm of a child lies a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain animals [...] Indeed, even great criminals, and humorists, as they are represented in literature, compel our interest by the narcissistic consistency with which they manage to keep away from their ego anything that would diminish it.⁸⁶

If Freud's reference to humorists reminds us of that ludicrous element that pertains to images of Howard's body the overall context should lead us to see this as far from innocent laughter. For the other function of the ego ideal, which Freud later termed the super-ego, is self-criticism. We are all familiar with the 'cruel self-depreciation of the ego combined with relentless self-criticism and bitter self-reproaches,' that is to say, we're all familiar with shame and guilt. Freud argues that such self-hatred originates in the ego-ideal. More specifically, it's a form of grief. Our anger at the loss of the parental gaze that looked upon in all our perfection

is transformed into a parent-like gaze that is always angry at us. The ego-ideal is, then, both an idealised version of the self, and a vicious internal agency that attacks the ego for failing to live up to it. No wonder love often goes so wrong.

This picture of ‘the ego divided, fallen apart into two pieces, one of which rages against the second’ is, according to Freud, our common lot.⁸⁷ Given this picture, the attractions of love, which Hegel once described as ‘mind’s feeling of its own unity’, are probably clear.⁸⁸ We carry an uneasy patriarchy within us, and the chance to shoulder parental responsibility for that onto another (another narcissistic enough to merit love) is hard to resist. Freud himself talks of the ‘cure by love’, and mentions that people invariably prefer to tackle their neuroses that way, rather than through the hard path of analysis.⁸⁹ It’s worth adding that a substratum of envy pertains to romantic love too, as literature has long attested (‘Why me of all people, Werther? I belong to another, so why me?’).⁹⁰ Those under Howard’s sway take the cure by love too.⁹¹ That’s not to say that they identify with him on any ego–ego level, whereby they might act as egotistically as him, or even with as much cruelty or violence. Brett is quite right to question the idea that ‘the Australian people’ vote for Howard simply because they are ‘racist, uncaring, reactionary’ and so forth.⁹² It’d be more accurate to say, of those swayed by Howard, that their conflict is elsewhere. That’s probably why they are so comfortable and relaxed. Mind, to get this sort of dynamic functioning, to place Howard in the parent/child position (the one whose sins we forgive, and who might just love us in return) it’s not enough just to find an adult/child to adore and treat with indulgence and be afraid of. The picture’s not complete till you have a rival.

‘But people look past that and say well it doesn’t matter if he’s attractive [...]’. In section five above, I left uncommented the strange phrasing Brett’s informant Marc uses to express the fact that he appreciates Howard in spite of his appearance. Obviously Marc means ‘it doesn’t matter that he’s not attractive’. I find the ambiguity in his phrasing revealing all the same, and that’s because I think Freud is right. Howard’s supporters love him, with all the force of an erotic tie. It is an erotic tie. But for that you need a rival.

10.

All of the children witnessed the same act of self-harm by an adult detainee who repeatedly mutilated himself with a razor in the main compound of the detention centre. Children also described having witnessed detainees who had slashed their wrists, jumped from buildings, resulting in broken legs, and detainees attempting to strangle themselves with electric cords. At times, children witnessed their parents’ suicide attempts, or saw their parents hit with batons by officers. A number also witnessed their friends and siblings harming themselves.⁹³

That’s from Zachary Steel’s 2003 report on the psychological impact of the long-term mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Howard was unapologetic. Asked by ABC reporters, in

2005, at the inauguration of the government's new 'soft stance' on immigration, about whether he was concerned about the damage children had suffered in his detention centres, he replied 'perhaps their parents should have stopped to ask themselves whether they should have tried to come to this country in an unauthorised way in the first place'.⁹⁴ Children are abused by way of their parents. Nor were those parents to be shown any mercy.

Ahmed Alzalimi was an Iraqi refugee living in a flat in Sydney, so devastated by the news of the death of his three beloved daughters that he had ceased to eat and drink. Sondos Ismael, his wife, who had seen her daughters drown, was now in a guesthouse on the outskirts of Jakarta, in the grip of a grief inexpressibly profound. In Australia a political question arose: should Ahmed be permitted to visit his wife. To the government the answer was clear.⁹⁵

It was the Howard government's innovation of denying bona fide refugees like Ahmed the right to bring their families over to join them that led to their presence on the boat now known as *SIEV-X*, and thus their drowning. Howard refused to waive that other stipulation of Ahmed's Temporary Protection Visa, the one stipulating that a holder who travelled outside Australia had no right of return. He refused on national television, just prior to the 2001 election, and with images of the three children across the papers.

PAUL MAGEE teaches creative reading at the University of Canberra. His *Cube Root of Book* was published in 2006 by John Leonard Press. Paul has published on questions of ideology, cynicism, boredom and revolutionary upheaval. He is President of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia. <paul.magee@canberra.edu.au>

1. J. Howard in J. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party's Australia*, Quarterly Essay 19, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2005, p. 23.
2. J. Howard in G. Rundle, *The Opportunist: John Howard and the Triumph of Reaction*, Quarterly Essay 3, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2001, p. 26.
3. J. Howard in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 33.
4. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. III.
5. J. Howard in J. Brett, 'The New Liberalism' in R. Manne, *The Howard Years*, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne, 2004, p. 86.
6. Brett, 'The New Liberalism,' p. 87.
7. Brett, 'The New Liberalism,' p. 86.
8. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 32.
9. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 35.
10. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 36.
11. J. Howard, in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 34.
12. M. Cockburn, in G. Henderson, *A Howard Government?: Inside the Coalition*, HarperCollins, Pymble, 1995, p. 16.
13. Henderson, p. 26.
14. J. Howard in Henderson, p. 27.
15. N. Pearson in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 31.
16. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. IV.
17. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. III, p. IV.
18. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 36.
19. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 72.
20. Brett, 'The New Liberalism,' p. 86.
21. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 39.
22. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 40.
23. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 36.
24. J. Howard in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 30.
25. 'Barnaby's a Good Bloke, Declares Howard', *The Age*, 10 August 2005.

26. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 36.
27. Brett, 'The New Liberalism', p. 86.
28. M. MacCallum, 'Howard's Politics' in R. Manne (ed.), *The Howard Years*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2004, p. 61.
29. D. Horne, *Looking for Leadership: Australia in the Howard Years*, Viking/Penguin, Ringwood, 2001, p. 65.
30. Horne, p. 66.
31. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. iii.
32. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 49.
33. Horne, p. 8.
34. Rundle, p. 6.
35. M. MacCallum, *Run, Johnny, Run, The Story of the 2004 Election*, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney, 2004, p. 4.
36. MacCallum, *Run, Johnny, Run*, p. 9.
37. M. Dorovic in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 70.
38. C. Walker in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 58.
39. L. McGuiness in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 63.
40. MacCallum, 'Howard's Politics', p. 61.
41. C. Johnson, *Governing Change, Keating to Howard*, UQP, St Lucia, 2000, p. 38.
42. Johnson, p. 7.
43. M. Farr, 'Howard's Agenda' in D. Solomon (ed.), *Howard's Race*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2002, p. 13.
44. Johnson, p. 7.
45. J. Howard, cited in Henderson, *A Howard Government?*, pp. 29–30.
46. Johnson, pp. 40, 42.
47. Horne, p. 210.
48. M. Wade, 'We've Had it Easy for Too Long', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2006.
49. K. Hood, 'People Talk About Unfair Dismissal but They Do Not Mean the Same Thing', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2006.
50. W.R. O'Reilly, 'Employers Have Finally Got Some Rights Back', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2006.
51. J. Howard in P. Charlton, 'The Terror Campaign', in D. Solomon (ed.), *Howard's Race: Winning the Unwinnable Election*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2002, p. 129.
52. J. Howard in D. Marr and M. Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2003, p. 63.
53. See R. Manne with D. Corlett, *Sending them Home: Refugees and the New Politics of Indifference*, Quarterly Essay 13, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2004; M. Leach and F. Mansouri, *Lives in Limbo: Voices of Refugees under Temporary Protection*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2004; W. Maley, 'Refugees' in Manne, *The Howard Years*, pp. 144–69.
54. It certainly worked for Howard. Indeed, this strategy marked the decisive consolidation of his power—as Robert Manne puts it, Howard 'solved the riddle of Australian politics with his conservative populist solution, in the period between Tampa and the election of 10 November 2001' (R. Manne, 'The Howard Years: A Political Interpretation,' in Manne, *The Howard Years*, p. 50). He solved it with a massive display of resentment, and revenge.
55. S. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in Penguin Freud Library no. 12, Penguin, London, 1991, p. 152.
56. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 40.
57. C. Johnson, 'John Howard and the Mainstream', in M. Simms and J. Warhurst, *Howard's Agenda: The 1998 Australian Election*, UQP in association with API-Network, St Lucia, 2000, p. 20.
58. Farr, 'Howard's Agenda', p. 17.
59. Manne, 'The Howard Years', p. 21.
60. Figures from Manne, 'The Howard Years', p. 9.
61. Manne, 'The Howard Years', p. 21; J. Howard, cited in Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 32.
62. In fact she sees a link between Howard's tendency to break promises and conventions to suit his purpose and earlier moments in his party's history, such as Fraser's dubious withholding of supply in 1975. The Liberals, she adds, 'seem more easily able to convince themselves of their own righteousness [...] bending if not breaking the rules' to serve their ends (*Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. 45). And she makes clear that Howard's relation to the GST was hardly populist (p. 43). It's just that these factors don't seem all that important, in her analysis, when compared to Howard's ability to tell a convincing 'national story' (p. 72). Whereas I'm going to argue that the privilege Howard claimed for himself in relation to the GST was an outrightly populist manoeuvre; as I shall seek to show, populism is predicated upon the special privilege of the leader who calls it forth.
63. H. Irving, 'A True Conservative?' in Manne, *The Howard Years*, p. 114.
64. Irving, 'A True Conservative?', p. 97.
65. G. Brennan, cited in Irving, 'A True Conservative?', p. 105.
66. P. Charlton, 'Tampa: The Triumph of Politics', in Solomon, *Howard's Race*, p. 102.
67. Irving, 'A True Conservative?', p. 106. For a more recent analysis of Howard's 'limited faith in Government', from the editor-at-large of the *Canberra Times*, see J. Waterford 'ACCOUNTABILITY, By all accounts, this is a government that can get away with anything', posted on 5 July 2006 at <http://www.apo.org.au/webboard/results.shtml?filename_num=88560>.
68. Figures and headline cited in P. Browne, 'Introduction', P. Browne and J. Thomas (eds), *A Win and a Prayer, Scenes from the 2004 Election*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 8.
69. J. Howard, cited in Browne, 'Introduction', p. 9.

70. P. Hartcher, in MacCallum, *Run Johnny, Run*, p. 199.
71. Charlton, 'Tampa: The Triumph of Politics', p. 96.
72. Marr and Wilkinson, p. 129.
73. Marr and Wilkinson, p. 287; Waterford, 'ACCOUNTABILITY', n.p.
74. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 151.
75. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 151.
76. C. Milne, *Little Johnny and the Naughty Boat People*, Milne Books, St Kilda, 2001, n.p.
77. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 152.
78. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 150.
79. It is instructive to note that Howard's 2004 election victory over Latham can be analysed as a battle over competing images of masculinity, specifically fatherhood. In the course of 'Political Cares: Gendered Reporting of Work and Family Issues in Relation to Australian Politicians', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 46, March 2005, Kathie Muir analyses opposition leader Mark Latham's 'use of his role as an actively engaged father of two young sons to construct a political identity that sharply contrasts with that of the Prime Minister' (p. 78). Commenting that 'images and performances of specific masculinities are rarely investigated' when it comes to politicians (p. 78), Muir shows how Latham used family photo opportunities and public statements ('fatherhood for me has been the great experience that you can have to really know the love of a parent' (p. 80) to project a particular image of paternal appeal, which she glosses as 'The "New Father" as a Leader for New Times'. Muir proceeds to contrast the positive valency of media images of male politicians as fathers, with the decidedly negative images that pertain to female politicians as mothers; e.g. the questions Cheryl Kernot faced from the press in 1998 as to whether she was neglecting her family by flying to Hobart to speak at the ALP National Conference, while they were back home in Brisbane packing up to move house (p. 85). Muir backs up her archive of such cases with research from Holland, which shows 'the continuing deployment of traditional signifiers of femininity in political reporting of women's performance in politics' (p. 78). Parliamentary politics is quite literally patriarchal in Australia, as in many other countries. (Of course none of this is eternal. Or rather, what really counts is the triadic/Oedipal structure of love that democratic politics relies upon, not the gender of the bodies that might be placed there in any given epoch, in response, or even challenge, to contemporary mores. We do seem to be in the midst of some, albeit slow, change in this latter respect. A case study of the reporting *qua* gender of One Nation leader Pauline Hanson would be interesting, in this regard. By my reading, she's the first Australian female politician with openly prime ministerial ambitions.)
80. Needless to say this is not a common position. I have been citing from Freud's 1921 text *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. This text of Freud's was key to Adorno's analysis of Nazism in the 1940s and 1950s (See T.W. Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in A. Arato and E. Gebhart (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Continuum, New York, 1994, pp. 118–38), but has otherwise had surprisingly little impact on post-war political theory. Maybe it's too disturbing. After all, Freud identifies envy and patriarchy as the structural bases to all egalitarian group formations, from the group of friends right up to the massive modern state. That's disturbing, on both counts. It doesn't, for all that, mean that every egalitarian formation is fascist. Clearly there's degrees here. In fact, the politics for post-structuralism involves asserting the existence, and thereby validity, of these very degrees. Let me put it this way: anyone who takes the idea of democracy too seriously will end up a fascist. In a 1998 speech to the Canberra Press Club, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock attacked the Australian judiciary for overturning the decisions of his department's refugee tribunals: 'The courts have reinterpreted and rewritten Australian law, ignoring the sovereignty of Parliament and the will of the Australian people'. (P. Ruddock in Marr and Wilkinson, p. 32). What does this democratic assertion amount to, if not a repudiation of the constitutional separation of powers (elsewhere regarded as the bedrock of democracy)? The only way to satisfy the democratic demand that *one* single political apparatus unite us, is to undermine the validity of those other democratic systems and agencies that also do. A similarly democratic program—that we be united by one single set of laws, which render us all equal—underlay Howard's 1996 campaign against the rights of minority interests. 'In fact', as Donald Horne archly reminds, 'any government has hundreds, if not thousands, of policies for minority interests'. (Horne, p. 87.) That's basically what a government is there to provide. That's why democratic extremism, such as Howard's in 1996, or Ruddock's in 1998, is so perversely anti-democratic, such a vehicle for authoritarianism and bigotry. It's really just an advertisement for your new family, with Howard or Ruddock at its head. To put this argument into perspective, I would say that the reason democracy is not thoroughly awful is that people tend not to believe in it. They accept that there are many

different groups in their world, with many different competing claims upon them, and so are less at the risk of succumbing to the autocratic appeal of any particular one of them. At the very least, there's an executive, a legislature and a judiciary. The problem, on the other hand, with our supposed national character of 'egalitarianism, practical improvisation, scepticism toward authority, larrikinism, loyalty to mates, generosity' (Brett, 'The New Liberalism,' p. 82) is that it can so easily take on cultish forms, and that's because it, just like any other reaction-formation to sibling resentment, is predicated upon love for a leader.

81. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 153.
82. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 142.
83. J. Howard in Charlton, 'The Terror Campaign', p. 129.
84. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 143.
85. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 139.
86. Freud, 'On Narcissism', pp. 82–3.
87. Freud, *Group Psychology*, p. 139.
88. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1942, p. 110 (paragraph 158).
89. Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 96.
90. J.W. Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Penguin, London, p. 115.
91. 'Those under Howard's sway': I leave this formulation deliberately vague, because I'm not convinced I know how to specify this group more exactly. I basically mean Howard's voters, but to say so already raises all sorts of psephological questions about whether the last decade's Liberal voters have been voting for Howard himself, or just his party, and which of the range of various reasons have been driving each different one of them. Research into such questions is obviously valuable. By the same token, I'm not sure how much credence you can place in anyone's self-report on these matters, which is what the statistics by and large rely upon. Brett and Moran's method of in-depth interview and authorial interpretation strikes me as much more convincing (J. Brett, and A. Moran, *Ordinary People's Politics, Australians Talk about Life, Politics and the Future of the Country*, Pluto Press, North Melbourne, 2006). The question which for me both crystallises the methodological problems involved in psephological research, and suggests some alternate modes of approach, actually concerns the group of people who detest Howard.

Though I'm not referring to them as the people 'under Howard's sway' in the writing above, it strikes me that a consideration of the situation of people who despise Howard will cast some strange light on the question of how significant a democratically elected leader's role as leader in fact is. Freud does not address the issue of democratic political opposition in his theorisation of leadership, which in itself is an interesting omission. Or rather, he addresses it only insofar as he argues that the leader's followers *themselves* detest the leader. They want to dethrone him, indeed to murder him, and these parricidal desires provide the true source of the violence which is then acted upon designated rivals, like boat people. They're stand-ins for Howard (see further Freud's comments on the 'sacrificial meal' in S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in Penguin Freud Library no. 13, Penguin, London, 1985, pp. 193–208). But here it gets tricky. For, if this is the case, should we conclude that an oppositional voter's express hatred for Howard is simply an inverse mode of love/allegiance? I'm not sure, and I don't think we should reach that conclusion until a great deal more research is done on the topic. Nor should one ever forget that politics is always possible. One thing we can say, however, is that contemporary parliamentary politics is incredibly intimate. A disturbing but revealing experiment for Australian readers involves tracking how often you hear Howard's voice, whether through television or radio, each week, and seeing whether you hear your friends', or perhaps your parents', voices, as often. Add to that your encounters with his quoted voice in print. Particularly during a Tampa crisis. It is really quite hard not to form a relationship, that is, a libidinal link, of some sort to someone whose words and style pass through your cerebral cortex with that degree of frequency. After all, they're right up close. It's the same with popular actors. But these ideas need to be read alongside Brett's *Relaxed and Comfortable*, which as I say in the writing above, tends as a whole to minimise Howard's personal role in his party's victories, and marshals persuasive arguments to this effect.

92. Brett, *Relaxed and Comfortable*, p. iv.
93. Z. Steel, cited in Manne, *Sending them Home*, p. 24.
94. *The Age*, 22 June 2005.
95. Manne, *Sending them Home*, p. 36.